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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ, IRAN, TERRORISM

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, January 23, focuses on the Lebanese Prime Minister's visit to Jordan and his talks with King Abdullah. Other lead stories continue to highlight developments related to the Iraqi government formation process and the upcoming Palestinian elections.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Positive indicators for the Iraqi elections"

The center-left, influential, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily Al-Dustour (1/22) editorializes: "Despite the current situation in Iraq and its many complications, the results of the parliamentary elections in Iraq have shown the natural size of the political forces in the Iraqi arena.. The Iraqis have always lived in a homeland with internationally and regionally agreed upon political and geographic borders, and they are not expected to depart from these borders. Neither are the Kurds able to establish a state extending through the Turkish and Iranian borders nor are the Shiites ready to become part of the Iranian nation. Moreover, the Kurds and the Shiites as well as the Sunnis are Iraqis who belong to the Arab nation and who belong to a country of historical, cultural and economic value, so why would any of them abandon it or turn against it? The Shiites are not the opposite of the Sunnis and there is no core difference between them despite the presence of disputes between them over how to deal with the post Saddam Hussein era. The biggest proof of this is that all vicious attempts at starting a sectarian war between have been put out by both parties.. The legislative elections are not by far the end of the path in the series of requirements that Iraqis must fulfill in order to contribute to the departure of the foreign forces. The elections are just the beginning of the road towards an even more difficult stage that represents the genuine test for Iraqis' ability to overcome this interim stage successfully. This is not just a political process, but a decisive struggle against the forces that want to create chaos. The unity of the representatives of the Iraqi people is one of the effective weapons to achieve security, stability and prosperity."

-- "For the sake of all"

The centrist, elite English daily Jordan Times (1/22) editorializes: "While US promises of bringing democracy to the region by occupying Iraq still ring hollow, hypocritical and not a little patronizing, the fact is Iraq has just announced the results of parliamentary elections that show some measure of equal representation for the various ethno-religious communities in the war-torn country. The question now is, what will this parliament, still a parliament under foreign occupation, do, and what kind of government will it form? It would be tempting to hope that a national unity government made up of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds is formed in an attempt to steer the country away from a potential civil war. More important than a unity government is a government that acts responsibly, and as the government of all the people.. The behavior of whatever new Iraqi government is formed is likely to be the crucial factor that will determine not only when the occupation of Iraq will end, but what kind of country will be left behind.. Important too is the behavior of the opposition. Opposition parties will have to confine their disagreement to the political arena.. It is also crucial in this mix that no Iraqi government be seen as anything other than Iraqi. The U.S.-led occupation forces must prepare themselves to withdraw. Ultimately, the responsibility for Iraq's future must rest with Iraqis, and Iraqis of all persuasions. The United States, the new parliament

and those who act in the name of Iraqi independence must all now show a maturity and a level of responsibility bordering on the superhuman. For the sake of us all, we must hope they succeed".

-- "The return of Bin Laden"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back-page of the semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (1/23): "The new Bin Laden tape broadcast by Al-Jazeera after more than one year of silence has its own objectives. The first is to declare that he is still alive; he was not killed by American bullets nor did he die of kidney failure, but opted for silence when he saw that silence is golden. The second is political and is represented in the offering of a truce to America, knowing well that it is going to reject it publicly, but hoping that it would accept it secretly.. The implicit message in Bin Laden talk is

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that America is in a receding position and that the resistance and Al-Qaeda are in a progressive position, and so the future does not look promising for America, and therefore it is better to decrease its losses and admit defeat. The U.S. administration will use Bin Laden's talk to rally support for the U.S. President and his policies. Threatening more terrorist operations in America is likely to facilitate the rise of the administration's civil rights transgressions, the continuation of the emergency status and to support the President in his large scale war on terrorism.. Other than raising the morale of Al-Qaeda members with the proof that their leader still lives, the main beneficiary from the tape is the U.S. President."

-- "Muslims and the nuclear weapons"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali writes on the back-page of the center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (1/22): "When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, we had said that its first and foremost goal is to turn Pakistan into an American military base in order to establish American control over Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. What happens today with Iran falls within the same context, namely preventing any Muslim country from owning any nuclear weapons, even if they were countries far away from Israel, because America is ultimately interested in easing Israeli fears and worries. After America's occupation of Iraq, it was proven that all pretexts and justifications for its occupation of Iraq were baseless fabrications, as America itself has admitted, and it became clear that the objective of occupying Iraq was to reassure Israel and to get Iraq out of the conflict once and for all.. The most that can be said about the noise being made about Iran's ownership of nuclear weapons is that it stems from attempts to quiet Israel's fears about Iran's potential ownership of a nuclear weapon. Senior strategists in America and Israel do not hide fears of any Muslim country's potential ownership of deterrent weapons that could be tools to achieve a balance and ultimately lead to a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab Israeli conflict.. The point is that America wants Israel to be the only power in the region and to have all the options and all the ace cards. It does not want to keep any ace card in the hands of Arabs and Muslims, starting with ownership of nuclear weapons and ending with resistance in Palestine."

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